ELC Newsletter
Spring/Summer 2013

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English Language Centre
Hello everyone,

Semester B, the Academic Year 2012 / 2013 sees the English Language Centre (ELC) shifting its focus to mainly the English Language Support Suite (ELSS).

Congratulations to Fiona Williams on her appointment as the Acting Head of the English Language Centre. On pages 3 and 4, Fiona talks about the events in this new Academic Year.

The next two pages (pp. 5 and 6) feature an interview with the Associate Head, Dr Hebe Wong on the EAP Foundation Paragraph Writing Contest: Peers’ feedback on ‘Words from Your Heart.’

Pages 7 and 8 highlight an interview with Graduate Teaching Assistants, Luke and Tom on the services offered by the English Language Support Suite (ELSS) to especially help students hone their speaking and writing skills, as well as practise being independent English language learners.

Seven Self-Access Centre (SAC) users kindly shared their views of the SAC, the ELSS activities and some ELC courses on pages 9 to 12.

We value any input you may have for us😊
I met up with Fiona Williams, the Acting Head of ELC recently. Fiona spoke at length about some of the events in the Centre this academic year and about all the facilities the ELC provides, under the umbrella of the English Language Support Suite (ELSS), to help students improve their English. She also urged all CityU students to make the most of these services and activities and talked about the provisional plans for the summer and next year.

To find out more, read on…

Q: What are some major events in the English Language Centre (ELC) in the Academic Year 2012 / 2013?

A: In Semester A, Academic Year 2012 / 2013, nine Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) were recruited as facilitators for the ELSS activities. These GTAs, who come from a variety of backgrounds, were recruited to help internationalize the campus, to help students to be more aware of different cultures and experiences, as well as to help students to improve their English.

Also, new this year was an exhibition showcasing the ELSS activities. This was set up at the beginning of the semester. Another new initiative was Hangout Week which was organised in week 8 in Semester B to give students a break from their mid-semester assessments. This included events like ‘Speed-dating’ and ‘Afternoon tea with the Queen’. Hundreds of students participated in the activities and positive feedback was received by the Centre.

Q: What are the supporting services provided by the English Language Support Suite (ELSS)?

A: The ELSS is divided into three parts: the Writing Development Centre (WDC), the Speaking Development Centre (SDC) and Independent Learning. If students need help with any part of the writing process, such as the planning stage or drafting, support can be sought from the Language Clinic (LC) in the WDC. The (LC) helps students with the structure of an essay and identifying common mistakes they make. If students need help in a specific area, they are encouraged to take part in the writing workshops held by the WDC.
The SDC allows students to practise communicating in English by means of different services and activities. For example, the Practical Language Activities (PLAs) enable students to use spoken English in a relaxed atmosphere. As these activities are mainly facilitated by the GTAs, their varied cultural backgrounds enable students to learn about cultures of various countries through communication. The English Language Mentoring Scheme, which is also part of the SDC, enables all first year students to meet regularly with a mentor to have fun while speaking in English. In addition, there are presentation skills and IELTS workshops offered by the SDC, as well as mock practice for the IELTS speaking test.

The aim of the Independent Learning component in the ELSS is to promote student’s English learning when they are off campus. This learning process depends absolutely on student initiatives. Staff guide students on how to learn by themselves by helping them understand their needs, their learning preferences, how to use the resources available in the Self-Access Centre (SAC) and online, as well as reflecting on their learning. Workshops are provided for the different skills. For example, if students want to improve their pronunciation, they can learn from the workshop what they need to do, what resources are available and how to use them.

Q: What are the activities that will be held in the summer of 2013 and the academic year 2013 / 2014?

A: During the summer period, 10 June – 26 July, the activities provided by the ELSS will be similar to those offered in the semesters. There may be a special week which is similar to the Hangout Week held in Semester B so that students can relax and at the same time, learn English. The GTAs are working on the programme now and it should be available very soon.

In the Academic Year 2013 / 2014, the ELSS will be organising all the popular events, classes and workshops and as always will be looking for new opportunities for students to learn English. They would love to hear from you too – any ideas you have would be welcome!

Tips: Do not think English is not important just because your intended job does not require a high level of English proficiency. Employers look for skills that make you stand out! If you use English outside the classroom or university, your English will be so much better than others applying for the same job as you. It will give you the edge! The ELC can help you with your English and the staff love doing this. So make them happy, come and see them!

By Kian Keung
The "English for Academic Purposes (EAP) Foundation Paragraph Writing Contest" this year has finally come to an end. The writing contest is an activity of the EL0009 EAP Foundation Course, a course specially designed for associate degree students in the BST Division with HKALE UE below grade “E” and HKDSE students with a relatively lower English proficiency level. “The purpose of this course is to increase their English level and provide a bridge for students with a weaker background to EAP, a course that students will move on to later,” said Dr. Hebe Wong, an Associate Head of the English Language Centre.

A blended learning approach is adopted in this 72-hour course. Learning takes place in three different modes - at computer workshops, classroom tutorials and guided reading groups - to cultivate students' reading and writing abilities. In reading groups, students are required to do close reading of “Diamond Hill”, a book sketching people’s lives in Hong Kong squatter villages from the 1950s to 1960s. “The book is about the Hong Kong environment...We are giving students a context that they are familiar with so that they can understand the book better.” Students are required to complete three reflective reports as assignments, which also later serve as entries for this paragraph writing contest.

The writing contest provides students with an opportunity to show their understanding of the characters and lifestyle as depicted in the book as well as to compare and contrast life then and now. The topics of the reflective reports include comparing the living environment of students and that of the author of “Diamond Hill”, the games they played when they were small; and the persons and objects they missed the most in their later years. Though the social activities, sights, disciplinary measures, and norms that the author is familiar with might be very different from those of EAP Foundation students, “It is important for youngsters to reflect on what they have learnt from the book, as well as what they know about themselves,” explained Dr. Wong.
So what are the qualities of the prize-winning articles that are appreciated by the majority of students? Dr. Wong discovered that they differed greatly from student’s ordinary assignments. “As a teacher I think those written work they submitted for the contest are much of a pleasure to read.” As all students could give advice to improve the paragraphs representing their class, the quality of the paragraphs written is observably higher. Furthermore, they had written on something they are very familiar with. Not surprisingly, the paragraphs could move the readers. “A teacher told me that one of the paragraphs really made him cry. That touched my heart as well. I don’t think I will have the same feelings when I’m marking ordinary essays,” Dr. Wong recalls, flashing a beaming grin.

Apart from strong vocabulary and fancy literary devices which capture the reader’s attention, group effort is also vital to the formation of an enjoyable article. ‘Write from your heart.’ Dr. Wong was quick to conclude, “The best written work should be something that you know well, and you really want to express your feelings about. Then you will find the language to express yourself.”

The EAP Foundation Paragraph Writing Contest is a fabulous opportunity for students to demonstrate the knowledge gained from both the “Diamond Hill” book and their peers. They can also share their achievements and write about their true feelings based on their insights.
Hello! Let us introduce ourselves first before we talk about the English Language Support Suite. Our names are Tom and Luke. We are both GTA’s (Graduate Teaching Assistants) working in the English Language Centre (ELC). It is our responsibility to run workshops and practical language activities (PLA’s) designed to help students improve their English skills.

The role of the English Language Support Suite (ELSS) is to provide support for students’ independent English Language learning. The ELSS offers a wide range of services. Its primary activities are PLA’s, which are informal, themed sessions aimed at allowing the students to practise and develop their conversational English. Examples of PLA’s are ‘Fun and Games,’ ‘Conversation Club,’ and ‘News and Current Affairs.’

The ELSS also facilitates IELTS workshops which target all the four skills of the IELTS test: listening, speaking, reading and writing. At the workshops, there is time for participants to practise sample questions, seek clarification regarding the skills tested, and prepare well for the IELTS test. On top of these, there are also ‘SAC workshops’ that focus on pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and listening. The Writing Development Centre (WDC) offers a range of writing workshops on topics such as ‘Effective Support and Elaboration,’ ‘Editing for Clarity and Style,’ and ‘Incorporating Sources,’ to name a few.
Summer activities will be mostly similar to the regular schedule and will definitely include PLA’s and IELTS workshops among other new activities! The confirmed schedule will be released soon. The ELSS is available and ever ready to help students when English language support services are required. For IELTS and SAC workshops, students are requested to register online for a workshop early at: http://booking.elc.cityu.edu.hk/ELC.Booking

For those who are unable register for a particular workshop before its commencement, just drop by the assigned venue for the workshop anyway! Master’s students are invited to join any workshops too.

Students tend to benefit from the ELSS’s services by joining as many activities as possible and seeking assistance when they need it!

Tom and Luke, on behalf of all GTA’s, have a message for CityU students regarding the ELSS: “Do join the ELSS activities! They’re absolutely free and here to help YOU. We wish we had such free services to help us do better in our studies when we were in University!”

N.B. The ELSS is located at the English Language Centre, level 2, Green Zone, Academic Building 1.

By Zayar Lynn
I spoke to seven CityU students to gather their views of the Self-Access Centre (SAC), English Language Support Suite (ELSS) activities and English Language Centre (ELC) courses. The interviewees, Year 1 to Year 3 students, are from the following majors: Applied Chemistry, Business (4-year course), Electronic Commerce, News Media, Psychology, Translation and Interpretation.

**AL, Year 1 student**

In the SAC, AL usually reads IELTS books, grammar books and magazines. He appreciated the IELTS speaking workshop because one-to-one practice was provided for participants at the workshop.

He commented that the SAC is a great place for students who usually study alone. The centre provides a range of sufficient resources for students to improve their English and prepare for their IELTS. He also likes the environment which is relatively quiet. He suggested that the air-conditioner’s temperature in the centre be adjusted to make the place cooler and more updated books be provided.

**JS, Year 1 student**

JS’s teacher, whom she met in University English Course, introduced her to the Self-Access Centre (SAC). She goes to the SAC once or twice a week. She normally refers to textbooks on writing, IELTS books and worksheets there.

She has benefitted a lot from her frequent trips to the centre. Firstly, the centre has helped her to improve her English skills. Secondly, she can learn a lot from the textbooks on writing and grammar in the centre. Lastly, the services and materials on the IELTS there are really helpful for test preparation. She suggested that the SAC purchase new books because some books in the centre are rather outdated.
**PH, Year 2 student**

PH’s friend introduced him to the SAC. When he is in the centre, he normally watches DVDs and reads magazines. He said that the centre is quiet and just the right place for him to study. Having completed the University English course, he felt that the course had helped him to improve both his writing and presentation skills.

**SW, Year 2 student**

SW, who goes to the SAC weekly, mainly does IELTS practice there. He commented that the centre had helped him a lot for his IELTS preparation in terms of the wide range of IELTS resources, especially old test papers available there. He said, “If I were to buy the materials on my own from bookstores, it would cost me a lot. However, at the SAC, I can get free access to them.” He added that some online resources on the IELTS are also very useful.
YL, Year 2 student

YL’s ELC instructor introduced her to the SAC. Last year, she went to the SAC daily. Now, she goes there in her free time as she has got a busier schedule in her second year of study. She makes good use of the daily newspaper and the recording facilities provided by the centre.

In her first year of study in CityU, YL went to the SAC every morning to read both the English and Chinese newspapers. She is grateful that the centre provides newspapers in the two languages. She can read both the newspapers and for instance, compare the terminologies used in translation, hence improving her translation skills. She uses the video recording studio and the Multi-Purpose Room (MPR) in the SAC to record her academic materials because she could not find anywhere else to do the recording on the CityU campus. Fortunately, the recording facility in the SAC is extended to her and other CityU users who may need it.

YL enjoyed reading the novels she borrowed from the SAC as she could read the novels comfortably at home and improve her reading skills at the same time. Concerning the SAC workshops, she suggested that one-to-one mentor program be offered instead. She sang praises for a particular writing workshop she had attended. At that workshop, she and other participants were provided with some useful links to help them to improve grammar. Therefore, she suggested that some useful links be provided for students who attend the SAC workshops.

Overall, YL feels that the SAC has been instrumental in helping her to improve her English. She said, “I can use different kinds of resources to enhance my English and these resources are inanimate. I am the only human. So by communicating with these inanimate resources, my self-study skills have improved through self-directed learning.”
**YH, Year 3 student**

YH’s tutor brought him to the SAC. In the centre, he usually borrows and reads books, especially IELTS books, watches DVD and uses a computer. If the SAC is rated from 1 to 10, he would rank it 6 or 7 because it helps him to improve English and provides valuable resources free of charge. However, YH thinks the SAC is quite warm and small in size. He suggested that the air-conditioner’s temperature in the centre be adjusted and more updated books be provided. He has taken ELC courses such as Spoken English, Written English, Presentation Skills and Debating Skills. He enjoyed the courses because they are free and relaxing and could help him to improve his English.

**YN, Year 3 student**

YN’s ELC tutor introduced him to the SAC. He goes to the centre three times a week. The ELC courses that YN has completed are Written Language, Spoken Language and Debating Skills. Among them, he likes the Written Language course the most because the content of the course is very useful to him and it is very similar to the IELTS writing section. He commented on the course teacher, Mr James King, who is not only very responsible and efficient, but also able to monitor his class well. He said, “By taking ELC courses, I see significant improvement in my English language ability. Eventually, I may be able to obtain high scores in the IELTS that could help me to secure a placement for an exchange program.”

YN borrows IELTS books and revises his academic courses at the SAC as it is a quiet place. He commented that the centre has helped him a lot to improve his English; in fact, it is better than the main CityU library due to its atmosphere and a smaller crowd. He highly commended the SAC for its range of resources, particularly the IELTS past year papers. He added, “The SAC has provided me with free access to resources, and Yes, I have saved a lot of money!” He suggested that the main door of the SAC be kept closed in order to make the centre a quiet place for studying.